Medieval Culture, Magic, and the Development of Trickster Gods

An Honors College Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Allyssa Burdine

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Alexander Kaufman

Ball State University

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Abstract

Modern culture has developed a new form of mythology through comics, movies, and story telling that involves the re-mythologizing of medieval cultures, with modern re-interpretations of gods and how their journeys are perceived. Amongst these gods are the tricksters who serve as heroic characters as well as hindrances to other heroes on some occasions. However, trickster gods are not a new concept to modern mythology; rather, they stem from their medieval counterparts. Loki, a popular trickster god within Marvel mythology, stems from medieval Norse mythology from 780-1070 CE. Lugh and Gwydion are other trickster gods that have also served as inspiration for today's trickster gods that developed to serve as explanations of behaviors, beliefs, social class, and magical attributes within their cultures.

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Process Analysis

At the start of the development of my thesis, I had thought I was going to create a project that pertained to developing a short story that did not make use of gender pronouns, physical descriptors, or gendered names. I wanted to complete this project to prove that it was possible to write a short story without creating automatic stereotypes through characters and show that it was a way to allow anyone to identify as any character as it was all told through a nameless, first person perspective. Then I thought to myself that the idea of working with trickster gods, who often switch their genders, would be interesting as well!

The topic of trickster gods struck my fancy when I was reading through Old Norse mythology, specifically the tale of "The Lay of Thrym" from *The Poetic Edda*. There, I found that Loki shapeshifted into a maid-servant while on a journey to retrieve Thor's hammer that had been stolen by the giants. Loki could have chosen any form to fool the giants, but he specifically chose to become a foot-servant, and I found myself questioning why he would do so. I had been looking for a way to incorporate gender roles into my analysis of other texts for my previous thesis idea, which was the creative story that would not use gender (or any physical descriptors) for the characters within the story. Though I still was looking towards writing the creative story, I began to ask myself, what else could I learn from trickster gods and genders that would help me to develop a sense of the cultures they were from. I wanted to know if there were other gods in cultures around the time that also could shape shift into the opposite gender and how and why they were able to accomplish this. With this idea in mind, I knew I had to do more research to see if I could find a connection between the trickster gods and their respective cultures views on magic and gender.

I also chose to follow through with the research on medieval culture, magic, and trickster gods because I found it to be a wonderful way to use all of my skills I was learning in my last semester of college. I have taken classes focused on gender and society, and I was in a colloquium on Thor, which helped me to round out my background knowledge on gender roles within our current society and how such ideas can be applied to comprehend the Norse culture. I am striving to understand how the cultures of specific people lead to the development of the character of a trickster god. I started writing as if everyone would know the definition of the trickster god already and realized I was highly mistaken. This helped me to develop the tone of my writing further than what I thought I needed to do. I realized I needed to take a stance is educational as well as argumentative to explain why it is important to understand the Old Norse, Old Irish, and Old Welsh cultures as a whole and how their beliefs regarding magic shaped the development of trickster gods within their respective mythologies.

I also have been learning more about magic than I thought I would as well. My original main point was going to be that only the cultures' were responsible for the development of the idea of trickster gods. However, as I continued to research into the mythologies of each culture, I found that magic was a prevalent theme between all three gods. Not only did the class structure play into the characteristics of trickster gods, but the ideas of who should hold magic, along with its relative good vs. evil factor, has also played a role in the development of the trickster gods.

With so many interesting ideas running around through my thesis, I struggled to keep the structure together for the paper until I started utilizing self-assessed progress bars on the section of my thesis that I was working on. Being able to sort my topics and ideas into a solid layout, working to develop one area at a time, and tracking my progress has allowed for me to gain control of my one thoughts and I can see my end goal coming nearer as I work through my

paper. I continued to use this method of self-assessment to allow for progression evaluation of moving from jotted down ideas into structured topics and arguments.

Lastly, I worked to re-evaluate the sources I was using during my writing and how I was integrating citations for such sources into my work overall. I went through and checked each of my cited courses once more to make sure that they were from books, from scholars, and were not based off of abstracts only. This helped me to eliminate sources that were scattered into my writing from when I was still drafting my thoughts and also helped me to ensure that the citations I was using were relevant to the paper. This helped me to re-evaluate my writing style for the paper. Specifically, with my paragraph transitions I was able to make sure that they were not based off of quotes that were not explained or properly worked into my writing, instead replacing the quotes with clear transitions into the next idea.

Medieval Culture and Its Influence on the Development of Trickster Gods

Fans cheer as they watch actor Tom Hiddleston struts down the red carpet for the premier of *Thor: Ragnarök*[1] (2017) as he poses for pictures giving his signature Loki[2] sneer. Thanks to Hiddleston, the dashing trickster god Loki has won his way into many Marvel fans' hearts, but where did Loki get his origins? While Marvel follows closely to Old Norse mythology, they have created their own deviations from the myths to in turn develop their own version of Norse Mythology. However, they kept to the idea that Loki was to be the trickster god of Marvel's version of Old Norse culture. However, the definition and development of a trickster god is not a discussion many trickster god fans have involved themselves in. What is a trickster god and why are they significant to mythology? How have the medieval cultures, settlements and society shaped their development and how they are represented in mythology?

Lewis Hyde provides a general explanation of the trickster god character. A trickster god is "the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox" (Hyde 7). A trickster never has a fully solidified identity as they are always changing from one persona to another. Their ideologies and beliefs never seem to have a singular view for their personal morals or how they view others. Hyde's definition seems to suggest that trickster gods are always living in the moment, but the scholar does not delve into the idea of what actions the trickster gods take to solidify their position as gods.

To help further understand the characteristics and actions of a trickster, it is important to also consider Paul Radin's definition of the archetype. Paul Radin was an American cultural anthropologist and folklorist of the early twentieth century. Radin's book, *The Trickster* (1956),

[1] Ragnarök pronunciation: /rægnəˌrɑk/
[2] Loki pronunciation: /loʊki/

states that the defining characteristics of the character type "[t]rickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself…He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being" (Radin xxiii). Radin's definition brings the idea of the trickster god towards the thought that they are chaotic beings who, through their actions, cause chaos for not only others, but also for themselves as well.

The two definitions, Radin's and Hyde's, both delve into the archetype of trickster gods, but neither solidifies the argument of how a trickster god lives and why they live in such ways. A trickster god is a being of chaos to both themselves and to others, but he or she does so for personal gain, through the use of magic, and to achieve power over others. The trickster god will live for the moments in which they are a part of, but will also actively insert themselves into moments that are not meant for them. A trickster god, for the purpose of this thesis, must be a being that comes from godly linage, possesses or wields magic, and acts for power or personal gain during times that they are not needed. Loki fits into the definition of a trickster god through Radin's, Hyde's, and this thesis' definition for the Norse culture.

However, there are trickster gods in other medieval cultures. Lugh is a trickster god within the Celtic mythology and is predominantly seen in Old Irish tales. Gwydion is also a Celtic trickster god, but is seen predominantly in Old Welsh tales. To begin to understand the connection between culture, magic, and trickster gods, it is important to understand the parts each of the trickster gods play within the tales of their people.

Loki is the trickster god, Oðin's[3] brother, and bringer of Ragnarök, the end of all life within the nine realms, including all of the gods as well, within Norse mythology during the

[3] Oðin pronunciation: /oʊdɪn/ and Old Norse pronunciation: /oːðinː/

period 780-1070 CE. He is known for his many adventures with his brother's son, Thor, and is also known for his cunning words against the gods. Through the use of his magic, Loki snuck into Thor's wife's bedroom, which was locked, and cut off all of her shining, golden hair, though he did promise to fix what he had done after Thor had nearly chocked him to death.

Not only does Loki fix his mistakes after receiving physical punishment, he also will run errands for the other gods if his life is placed on the line. In the tale of "Skaldskaparmal," of the *Prose Edda*, the gods are demanding of new items that will make them more powerful than other creatures in the nine realms and threaten Loki's life if he does not find them such items (Sturluson and Byock 57). Loki knows he must complete the task set before him or face his doom, so he determines that he will use his cunning words to trick the dark elves to create three fine treasures for him. He then, in turn, takes the treasures to the dwarves and dare them to make three finer gifts than the dark elves. His words of doubt successfully convince the dwarves to create three more gifts, but in return he must promise his head to them if they should produce such greater gifts. Once the dwarves win, they proceed to sew Loki's mouth shut to try to prevent him from speaking his cunning words ever again, though he does manage to bare through the pain and remove the thread holding his lips shut.

The cunning words Loki is able to speak are what are also able to persuade Höðr,[4] the blind god, into killing Baldr,[5] son of Oðin and god of light, joy, purity, and the summer sun, which triggers Ragnarök. Despite his use of magic to aid Thor, Loki also wielded his powers to play tricks against Thor and other gods. Loki even goes as far as to use his magic to discover what was necessary to trigger the beginning of Ragnarök. Within the texts of the *Prose Edda*

[4] Höðr pronunciation: /eɪʃöðɑr/ and Old Norse pronunciation: /Hǫðr/
[5] Baldr pronunciation: /'paltʏr/

Loki journeys from a cunning individual that walks with the gods to a traitor to his people and an unredeemable villain.

Unlike Loki, Lugh is considered to be a High King and trickster god, as well as a magic wielder, within Old Celtic texts, from the seventh through the twelfth century. Lugh, also known as “Lugus” or “Lug,” is never the primary king to his people of Túatha dé Danann, “but rather he takes over that role from Nuada when the Túatha dé Danann must battle the Fomoire. Lough comes from the outside and play the role of a savior” making himself not only a king, but a hero to the people as well (Olmsted 17). He wields magic through his spear, sling-stone, and sword, which are items embedded within magic that he is able to wield in battle. Though Lugh does not directly possess magic within himself, he is capable of utilizing many magical weapons at once, while also denying others the right to use these items as well.

However, it is not only Lugh’s possessions that give him magic, but also the lineage he descends from. Lugh was said to have been born by the virginity goddess, Aranrhod, after she was tested for her virginity by her uncle, the magician Math, and instantly birthed a son. The child was stolen by Gwydion, who we see transcend beyond Irish culture through the Celtic mythology to Welsh texts, and raised by him as well. Aranrhod continued her attempted to destroy her son, but was always countered by Gwydion’s magic. Through Gwydion’s magic, he was able to trick Aranrhod into giving her son a name and provide him with arms, though she had said she never would. Though she was successful in denying Lugh a human or pre-existing species wife, Gwydion was able to counter this denial through the creation of a wife made from flowers and then given a human form for Lugh to marry. Lugh’s origins within Celtic mythology have introduce another Celtic trickster god though, one that is older and far more experienced with being a trickster god, Gwydion (“Lugh”).

Gwydion is a Celtic god that was predominantly acknowledged eleventh-century Old Welsh texts. Though he is a Celtic god he was known as the Celtic trickster god and magician to the Welsh people. This acknowledgement is due to the amount of magic he possesses as well as his use of magic for personal gain and deception towards others. Gwydion is known for being an enchanter of trees, an aid to Lugh, a stealer of pigs from other worlds through magical trickery, a warrior hero, and the King of Trees "History - Themes - Mabinogion: Fourth Branch". However, Gwydion does also have a somewhat dubious past involving trickery through magic and deception.

According to "The Legend of Gwydion," written within *Mabinogion: Fourth Branch of Celtic Mythology*, which was compiled from oral tales to literature during the eleventh century, he is known for his theft of pigs from another world and the assistance in distracting his uncle, King Math (who is also the great uncle of Lugh), for his half-brother so he may seduce and rape the virgin foot-servant woman of his uncle. When stealing the other worldly pigs, Gwydion used his magic to turn mushrooms into twelve fine stallions with golden armor and twelve fine hunting hounds to trade the god Pryderi for his pigs from another world. At sunset, the twelve horses and hounds turned back into mushrooms, causing Pryderi to go into a fit of rage and start a war against Gwydion. This war was what served as the distraction for King Math, so that Gwydion's half-brother access to the virgin foot-servant.

Upon discovering Gwydion's assistance in the rape through his magical deception, King Math punishes both Gwydion and his half-brother through his magic. He is forced to live as a stag, a wolf, and a sow with the rapist, his half-brother, who is also his sexual counterpart. The two were forced to produce children together until King Math had deemed that they had learned

their lesson. Despite his troubling past, Gwydion is considered a kind god as he rescued and raised his nephew Lugh and even provided him with a wife while still being a trickster god.

Now that there is an understanding of the gods as individuals within the texts, the cultures of the peoples from which they stem, as well as their commonalities to each other, can be delved into. Through the synthesis of the cultures of the Norse, Irish, and Welsh, views on authority, social status, and the punishment for crimes against royalty and those who are authority figures, the role the trickster gods play in explaining such behaviors can be examined. It is important to understand these themes as they are three of the commonality points between the trickster gods presented. The commonalities between the tricksters god consist of the fact that each god is of royal blood and authority, has an intricate role amongst the other gods based on the social status given to them by others, must face punishment when defying those that are above them through power or authority, and are magicians through the possession of innate magical abilities and/or magical items.

Old Norse culture, from 780-1070 CE, has been captured through the tales of the *Poetic Edda* and translations by Snorri Struluson, an Icelandic historian, who was born in 1179 CE. The *Poetic Edda* gives an in-depth look into the Norse culture and how the people of the time viewed their society through their gods. Through the telling of these tales, the lifestyle and purpose of the Norse people can be interpreted and expanded upon.

The Norse people spread across Europe and across the sea, and they traveled with their pagan religion in toe to bring their new found people into their paganisitic views. The Norse Vikings traveled to many locations before famed explores had, such as land surveyed and scouted by Christopher Columbus (Fitzhugh 2). However, travel was not glorious for all within the Norse culture as some within the culture were a part of the serfdom used by the Norse. The

poem “The Lay of Ríg: Rígsþula,” from the *Poetic Edda*, serves as an explanation of the class order within the Norse culture. Through the poem it is seen that serfs are given the worst bought of living conditions, must complete the laborious and most grueling tasks, and are not given a parton god to worship within their community.

Unlike the serfs, the land owning class of Norse society likely did have a patron god to worship and look up to for a path to follow. Thor, the god of thunder and a great warrior known for kill giants, was associated with being the protector of Miðgarð/Earth, which likely made him the patron god and inspiration of the warriors. It is logical to believe that Thor was the inspiration to many warriors as he is portrayed as being a fearless warrior who is able to kill anything that he sets his mind to, a trait that would likely have helped motive Norse warriors into battle. However, what would the patron god of those of the aristocrats within the society be?

The aristocrats seen in “The Lay of Ríg: Rígsþula,” had homes filled with sparkling metals, well-formed living spaces, amassed amounts of followers, and were considered to be the fairest of the people in completion and in cleanliness. Those that lived the aristocratic life were likely dedicated to Oðin, perhaps trying to replicate Valhalla[6] where Oðin stayed to try to reach the same kingliness he carried. The most care was given to the dining halls within the aristocratic homes, resulting in gold-plated cups, silver-plated dining wear, and finely crafted tables (Hollander 120).

With the significance given to the dinners of the warriors of Valhalla, it is worth noting the times during which Loki was eating with the gods, he was being mocked at by the other gods during dinners and would lose his temper and abandon the dining hall. A specific case occurs during “The Flyting of Loki: Lokasenna,” of the *Poetic Edda*, when Loki is not invited to the

[6] Valhalla pronunciation: /vælˈhælə/ or /vɑːlˈhɑːlə/

dining hall after convincing Höðr to throw mistletoe at Baldr, which killed him and caused the beginning of Ragnarök. He storms inside the hall with sneers and jabs at the gods with his words until they are nearly about to rush him with their blood boiling in their ears (Hollander 90). Loki is not welcomed to sit at the table despite his inherited social status as Oðin's brother and his ability to anger the gods and goddess in the hall through his vexing words and disregard of the rules set by Oðin. He is not treated as an equal authority, but is rather treated as a nuisance and an errand boy. Loki has the ability to go undetected into different groups of people, and his lack of following the precedent set by Oðin to fight and kill those that do not follow the Norse gods, making him a nuisance rather than a warrior.

In order to understand Loki's frustration and how it relates to the social classes of Old Norse society it is important to see just how the gods follow the social system within their own people as well. In order to place the gods into the class system of the Norse, and understand how they are reflections of the Norse society, they must follow the criteria set forth by the *Poetic Edda*. The gods will be sorted in the following manner:

1. Gods and powerful beings that dictate the rules of the society and carry out punishments will be those that are of the aristocratic class.
2. Gods and powerful beings that live under those rules and serve as warriors will be those that are of the middle class.
3. Gods and powerful beings that may notice the rules set forth, often challenge the authority of rule makers, and are never treated as equals to the gods will be those that are of the serf class.

Starting with the aristocratic, class we must first look at Oðin, the king of the Norse gods. Oðin would be set as the aristocratic class amongst the gods, alongside his wife, as he is the one who

determines the rules of the society and the punishments of deifiers. Then there would be the other gods of Asgard, such as Thor, Höðr, and Baldr, that would fall into the land-owning class, as they are the greater majority of gods that are both freeman and land-holders of places across the nine realms. The lowest class, serfs, would fall onto the dark elves, dwarves, and giants that are set as the villains in the tales of the Norse gods through their unwillingness to follow the rules of Oðin. Where then does Loki fit into this social hierarchy?

Loki is the brother of Oðin, is part giant, and has plenty of magic to help him get around through his daily life. He is never said to have lived the great halls alongside his brother, and he does not abide by the rules laid out by Oðin to physically fight for victory. However, Loki also does not work for the people in any of the nine realms and does not claim to have any stake of land within the nine realms. That leaves the serf class that he could fall into based of his race, as he is part giant and does not follow the rules set forth by Oðin. In accordance with the hierarchy of Old Norse society, it would work best to assume that Loki would be considered a part of the serf class despite his title as the brother of Oðin, which helps to develop an understanding of his behavior towards the other gods.

From the tale “The Flyting of Loki: Lokasenna,” Loki is treated as if he is the lowest amongst the gods, where he believes that he is equal if not better than them, his behavior and cunning words are used to explain the defiance between the individuals within the aristocratic leadership. His behavior in this myth also allows for those of lower social classes to find justification in their anger against those of higher social classes that treat them unfairly.

However, there are punishments for not following the rules that are established by the aristocratic class, and within the Norse culture there were also courts present to help solve disputes between families and social groups. It was often families that were feuding with each

other, as the family unit was valued as the strongest and most important unit within social classes. While feuds may be an occurrence within Norse culture, reprimanding for unjust crimes was also common within the culture.

> A man is bound to take up the feuds as well as the friendships of father or kinsmen. But feuds do not continue unreconciled. Even homicide can be atoned for by a fixed number of cattle or sheep, and the satisfaction is received by the whole family. This is much to the advantage of the community, for private feuds are peculiarly dangerous side by with liberty. (Mattingly 118)

According to Tacitus, if families were not able to resolve their disputes on their own, they would be brought before a court to establish what should be done to forgive the crime that was committed. However, through the development of friendship and bonds formed between families, there was often little need for court cases. Large groups of people united around a common cause was often viewed as a must have as it made the individual families far less vulnerable than if they were to be separated from each. It is also important to the Norse culture that a man and a woman had equal rights and an outspoken woman is often the head of a family within the household.

Women were often associated with being magic users within the family as well, having the ability to traverse the spiritual realm and through witchcraft (magic) to develop answers to questions. Men, however, were to seek and celebrate friendships and try to win fame and a good name that would outlive themselves and carry through their family. The stance that men take though does not apply to Loki as he never seeks to create a name for himself as a warrior, but rather he is motivated to create chaos and have name created for him based on his intellect and magical prowess. With the development in Loki's character through the tales, it can be

concluded that men that do not seek to create a name for themselves through fighting may have been viewed as taking on a woman's role. While Loki may have the role of a woman, a serf, and a trickster, his Old Irish counterpart, Lugh, serves as a young king and trickster god based upon the Old Irish society.

The social class structure of the medieval Irish, according to O'Sullivan and Nicholl, were centered around dwellings and settlements of the people. These locations were where the people could learn, perform, and negotiate their social status throughout their lives. The medieval settlements of Old Irish society were comprised of social classes of king, lord, free commoners, in which there were farmers and land-owners, tenants of the land, hereditary serfs, and lastly fully unfree slaves. The king would oversee all of his plots of land and lords, passing on his work to his heir, while lords would oversee the people on their specific land plots. The free commoners that were farmers and landowners would own land and plough it themselves, and though the land was overseen by the lord, these land owners did not have to pay rent to the lord. However, the lower grade of freeman and tenants of the land rented small farms from his lord and in return would pay his lord with an annual food rent or meat, grain, dairy, and crops. The hereditary serfs were those that had been born on the lord's land, but were of a lineage of slaves that had been given some rights by the lord. These serfs would work their lord's land in return for goods and protect, were their fully unfree slave counterparts were not allowed to hold onto any possessions, could never have property, and took on the most labor intensive jobs of the land.

While this social class system has more discrete social classes than that of the Old Norse culture, there is still an over-arching three tier class system: aristocracy/authority, middle class, and serfs/slaves. However, there is the addition of a distinct division within the aristocracy of

king and lord, which creates a new theme for Celtic mythology to incorporate for the gods' social class structure.

Lugh, of Old Irish myths, is known for being a high king amongst his people, and he rules over them in a similar style to his great uncle King Math; that is, with kindness and beneficence. However, the passing of kingship onto Lugh does not follow in the tradition of father to son of the Old Irish social class, but rather follows the lineage of King Math, to his son, Gwydion, and on to Lugh, who is the nephew of Gwydion. Lugh has no father from which to inherit kingship or lordship; as such, receiving kingship from his uncle serves as an explanation for the passing of the throne to an heir that is not a son when the previous ruler has no son to serve after him. When Lugh is first learning from Gwydion and is receiving his place in the mythology, it can be seen as a way for him to prove himself worthy to King Math in order to receive the title of Lord, and proving to Gwydion that he will be a successful heir. Unlike Loki, Lugh was never burdened with having to serve as a lower class individual and was also accepted as King of the people despite not being the direct heir to the throne.

Without such burdens placed upon Lugh, it is no wonder he himself never caused trouble amongst his social order, unlike his uncle Gwydion who was popular in Welsh Celtic mythology. Lugh is a trickster god to the Irish folk due to his ability to follow through with Gwydion's deceit of his mother and his ability to wield magical weapons. However, Gwydion is not the predominant trickster god in Irish mythology, but he is the prime trickster god in Welsh mythology due to his druidic magic, which was favored in Welsh culture.

The Welsh saw magic as an influencer of nature and also believed that nature could fight back with the use of magic to animate the inanimate beings (Rutherford and Matthews 71). According to Simon Meecham-Jones, in the forward of R. Kennedy's book *Authority and*

Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales, Wales was a highly contested territory during the medieval era, serving at the battleground for many armies of opposing interests. Because Wales serves as a battleground for territory, the people of Wales never fully settled on an specific social class structure, but rather adapted to the new class structure that came as a result of each battle. Most of those who settled into the Welsh culture were from military backgrounds and were often the surviving fighters of the battles fought on the land.

Celtic mythology was carried throughout Wales by way of invasions from other peoples, lending a hand to favoring Gwydion as the favored trickster god of the Welsh people. Gwydion was known as the King of Trees, and often turned trees into warriors to fight in his battles. He was also known to be the instigator of wars as well because of his thievery and tricks against the royalty of other worlds. This trickery allows for the Welsh people to explain why there is a significant amount of war in their land, likely believing Gwydion to be the reason there was a new war breaking out across their land from time to time. Gwydion's magic allowed him to pick fights with other peoples that were not native to the area, but his magic also protected the people by creating natural warriors to defend them as well. While Gwydion is a king to his people, he is also a trickster god through his love of utilizing magic for personal gain and pleasure, a common trait seen in all three trickster gods, despite their differences in culture.

Because all three gods possess magic, either innate or through the power of physical items, it is important to understand the significance of magic within the cultural texts. In Old Norse literature, magic is mentioned to be used by those who can write and recite the runic language of the Old Norse people, but such inscriptions are never read aloud in the tales of the gods. There does, however, exists a warning of caution for those who wish to deal with magic users: "Be on your guard against treachery…Keep clear of sorcerers, for there are few things

stronger than witchcraft" (Kieckhefer 49). While magic users may be able to be slain with weapons, it may take those items that have runes inscribed on them to kill adversaries: Thor's hammer, which is inscribed with runes to imbed magic within it, and is made of magic metals. Regular weapons may require extreme skill to lock onto the target at hand as they move too swiftly for the average marksmen. Magic users can use deceit, trickery, and shape shifting to avoid taking damage and can gain the upper hand against others. Loki completes many of his plans through his ability to appear as other beings, such as turning into a mare to seduce the horse that was building the wall around Asgard, and even turning into a fish in an attempt to evade the gods after angering them when speaking against them after the death of Baldr.

The leading historian for the use of magic within mythology is Richard Kieckhefer, a Professor of Religious Studies and History at Northwestern University. Kieckhefer has written six works of literature pertaining to different mythologies throughout history and their views on the use and understanding of magic, one of which is *Magic in the Middle Ages*.[7] This particular text will serve as a main reference for understanding the view on magic within Old Norse and Old Irish literature and culture.

Kieckhefer mentions that in some tales' entire families of sorcerers will encompass their enemies' territory to begin reciting runic language, luring one of their enemies out, and can cause them to instantly drop dead (Kieckhefer 51). Old Norse magic is viewed as being the cause of death or requiring deadly actions in order to take place and often involves sacrifice and blood to set magic lose into the world. Even Oðin, the all father of the Norse gods, was noted to have used magic to obtain great wisdom, but he had to hang himself in order to be revived through the

[7] Other texts by Kieckhefer can be found through https://www.religious-studies.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/tenure-track-faculty/richard-kieckhefer.html

mystic runic language. Life as a magician is not seen as a favored means of existence for the Norse people, and their literature serves as a warning to be wary of those who utilize magic; indeed, magicians are often viewed as foreign enemies who are constantly on the verge of threatening their normal way of life.

Magic is also noted in Old Norse texts during the peoples' time of conversion toward Christianity, likely to have started with the signing of the Treaty of Wedmore in 878, perhaps to help explain why it is best to move on from their form paganist religion (Kieckhefer 50-51). Those that brought Christianity to the Icelandic people, who still followed Old Norse beliefs at the time, brought along a strong agenda against magic. To the Christian people of the eighth century, "sorcery is part of a culture that Icelanders are supposed to have forsworn at baptism as one of the Devil's work," and therefore the survival of Paganism began to dwindle and in myths that came after this time magic was seen less by all and only by characters that were to be villainized (Kieckhefer 51).

A recent analysis done by Stefanie Von Schnurbein, author of *History of Religions*, looks to determine the validity of the research and statements created by others who have studied magic in Old Norse mythology. Schnurbein found that those who argue that the Old Norse viewed magic as a part of their paganisitic religion "are interested in the reconstruction of magic and ritual of pre-Christian Scandinavians and in evidence of lively cultural transfer" and look to within the medieval period and attempt to stay neutral towards the idea of it being view as evil or good (Von Schnurbein 126).

However, Von Schnurbein found an opposing research method exists for those that look to deny the development of magic within the Old Norse culture. Those that argue against the commonality of magic within Old Norse culture claim that magic is seen only in select

geographical locations that were conquered by the Norse and often research well beyond the Medieval Ages to find isolated cases of magic within select locations of Old Norse culture without analyzing the culture as a total people (Von Schnurbein 126). Due to Von Schnurbein's analysis of researches how work to understand the spread of magic within Old Norse paganism it is wise to believe that Kieckhefer's research of Old Norse mythology and magic is accurate to the mythology as the research is based on the medieval era.

Kieckhefer also provides insight into the Celtic literature written during the medieval era, specifically those composed in the Ireland and Celtic regions, which would include the Welsh people who also practiced Celtic Paganism. The paganism that the Celtic Welsh practiced is different from that of the Norse predominantly through the fact that nearly all the Celtic gods have magic and they do not actively use their magic on themselves, but rather on objects, animals, plants, and other gods. Most of our information from the Celtic mythology comes from the twelfth century and beyond, after the areas that were influenced by Celtic mythology had begun to learn to write due to the influx of Christian communities that brought the education of such systems along with them (Kieckhefer 53).

The magicians of Celtic Paganism are often associated with having abilities that work alongside nature or use natural components to complete their spells. These magicians are known commonly as druids throughout the Celtic texts and are "true magicians because their power comes not from God but from demons" and that of fae (fairy) kind (Kieckhefer 54). However, from Kieckhefer's argument, Ireland's and Wales's views on the Celtic mythology and literature should align perfectly within their mythology, which is known to not be the case as Lugh is an Irish trickster god, while Gwydion is a Welsh trickster god despite the fact that they both stem from the Celtic mythology.

It is important to also determine the influence of the Irish people on medieval Welsh literature that has been translated in the eleventh century. In 2011, Patrick Sims-Williams released *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, which developed the understanding of how the Irish could influence the thinking of those that were responsible for Welsh literature. Sims-Williams' research reveals that there is "nothing inherently unlikely in the theory that Welsh literature was influenced by the Irish who settled in Wales in the fifth and sixth centuries…however, the ninth century is the earliest period at which we can do more than speculate the Irish influence" (Sims-Williams 29). Sims-Williams's also speculates that Irish scribes and scholars were likely to have crossed paths with those of their Wales counterparts and passed along their teachings. The passing of teaching in literature would help to develop an integrated writing system that was quasi-runic[8] in the Welsh texts and would reflect some ideology of the Irish due to the passing of literary techniques (Sims-Williams 30-32). It is possible to draw the hypothesis that the passing of literary techniques may have also caused the Welsh adoption of the Celtic mythology, and yet it also leaves room for the understanding of how the Welsh may have created their own spins of the Irish beliefs. Lugh is not worshiped as the trickster god that Gwydion is within Welsh mythology, but he is, however, worshiped as one in the Old Irish Paganism.

Despite the different areas of worship, all three gods utilize magic, or have magic used upon them, and affect the lives of themselves and other through their magic. The Celtic trickster gods, as well as King Math, are capable of being impacted by magic through others, can use magic on items, and punish others through their magic by turning them into animals. However, they do not use magic on themselves other than to develop elaborate disguise. For example,

[8] Quasi-runic: resembling the runic language.

Lugh is born through magic and is aided in his journey to become king by other's magic. He is also capable of wielding magic through enchanted weapons that were given to him by other gods. Lugh is also able to receive his name, his set of arms, and his wife all through the magic of other gods. It is never specified that Lugh uses magic himself, but rather reaches out to others to receive a bit of magical assistance when necessary.

However, Gwydion is also a magic user and a trickster god that uses magic to transform plants into animals and humans as well as to disguise himself and others for personal gain. Gwydion's magical feat of turning mushrooms into horses and hounds and turning trees into warriors displays how nature is the foundation of magic for the Celtic gods, and that turning plants into animate objects is not a magical feat that is out of the ordinary for a kingly god. Magic is not always used to enforce positive behavior within the Celtic mythology; it is also used as a punishment for those that defy King Math or seek to wrongfully harm other gods of the same culture for personal gain or pleasure.

Gwydion's forced transformation, after helping in the rape of King Math's foot-servant, into a stag, a wolf, and a sow with the rapist, his half-brother, as his sexual counterpart and being forced to reproduce until King Math was pleased, is an example of magical punishment. While the punishment could have been used to clean the castle for eternity or to use magic to act as a court jester for King Math, instead, magic was used to change two gods into animals involuntarily. Along with the non-consenting nature of the act of magic, it is also an act that strips away the humanity of the gods, forcing them to live and rape each other as animals, just as they had treated the foot-servant that they had raped as if she was a non-consenting animal. Animal transformation through magic serves as punishment for those that misbehave in Celtic mythology, but within Norse mythology animal transformation is used for mobility and trickery.

Loki only transforms into animals through the aid of magical falcon feathers, which allow him to transform into a falcon and fly, and by becoming a mare to distract a giant's horse. Though successful reproduction did occur as a result of becoming a mare, it was not the intended goal of the transformation, nor was it a punishment for Loki as he chose to undergo the transformation himself. Rather than utilizing animal forms to trick people, Loki utilizes his ability to change into other people and beings to achieve success in his plans. The biggest moment of deceit through shapeshifting is when Loki turns into an old woman to gain information on how to start Ragnarök. He makes himself appear completely harmless, as what god would fear a mortal, and takes advantage of his form to gain a large amount of traction in his plan to trigger the end of the nine realms.

Loki's magic is purely used for selfish gains, for even when he uses his magic to help others he is also helping himself by gaining their favor or keeping his own life safe from their wrath, which could be said to be the same for Gwydion. Despite Gwydion's helping hand for Lugh, he still may have only been interested in securing an heir to his throne as he never sired any viable offspring to take his place. Magic is used beyond physical conjuration as well.

As mentioned, magic is used in Loki's falcon feathers and is used in weapons in the Celtic mythology. Magical items are seen through both mythologies as a way to enhance a being, even if they already have a significant amount of power. Not only do magical weapons occur in Celtic mythology, but they also occur in Norse mythology as Loki is often running errands to find new magical items for the gods and helping them to retrieve their belongings if they are ever lost or stolen. While magic may not be viable for every god to use across the mythologies, the gods that can use magic are not afraid to use it on behalf of others, and trickster gods are certainly not above using their magic to deceive others for their own personal gain.

Personal gain through magic and deceit are common themes for the Old Norse and Old Celtic mythologies, and despite their geographical differences, these themes still transcend into both cultures. Trickster gods are seen as a root cause of chaos, disorder, and an explanation for why people may act out of line no matter what class they are a part of. Kings, lords, and princes are susceptible to being the tricksters no matter the culture and are often such characters due to the power that they hold. Whether their power comes from magic, social class, or the ability to influence others' lives, the tricksters' power is still capable of being used to transgress and upset the balance of lives, especially in the mythological texts, works that are populated with character types who often resemble and represent the layer of the social strata of the Old Norse, Old Irish, and Old Welsh cultures.

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